issue three

William Burroughs

Tom Robbins

Timothy Leary

Michael Nesmith

John Lilly

Jello Biafra

Tarantula Venom

Durk and Sandy

Lucumi Magic

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Megabrain

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Alison K

What, you've never heard of Eric and the Flying Tarantulas?" Harold, a Flying Tarantula, sounded properly scornful.

I had to confess, shamefacedly, that I was not up on the local rock scene. Too many misspent hours in mouldering library stacks. I was a medical anthropologist, I explained—looking at animal medicines. No, not veterinary medicines, but medicines derived from the faunal realm. "At the moment, I'm working on sting-ray venom and its ritual use by the Maya. '*Byegone Trygons Of The Ancient Maya*', I'm going to call it."

Harold looked unimpressed. "We're into tarantula venom ourselves," he said jadedly.

"Really?!" I said, suddenly rapt with fascination. It was a blue moon—the second full moon in September—and I had just worked my way backstage at the Nina Hagen concert, narrowly escaping an attempted rape by a paraplegic in the lobby, and I was prepared to believe anything. "Are you really?" I pressed for details. "How do you do it?"

They smoked it, it transpired. On joints. Just before they performed.

Harold expanded with gusto on his favorite theme while Eric looked detatched and slightly supercilious. Eric, it appeared, did *not* do tarantula venom. It was "Eric *and* the Flying Tarantulas", he pointed out pedantically. He cultivated an air of precocious world weariness and terminal ennui. The Tarantulas, it was explained to me, came and went, in shifts or cycles. They had periods of dormancy where presumably they recharged their shattered nervous systems but eventually resurfaced as dithyrambic as ever.

I peered at Harold, who looked normal enough, though ever-so-slightly bug-eyed. He had about him an aging whiz-kid quality. Zooey Glass. One of the Smart Patrol.

"What about Latrodectus mactans?" I asked, thinking to score a point or two. Black widow poison was one I knew.

"Oh, that's a complete bummer," he said. "Don't even try it."

Harold was a bio-chem student and worked in the lab. Tarantula venom was definitely an exotic. It was not in the Sigma catalog, though they had everything from Bufo Marinus to Naja naja. They were heavy on the snake venoms but spider venoms are still largely terra incognita even for the practicing venomologist. "But how do you get it?" I pressed. Here they hedged uncomfortably and exchanged sidelong glances. "Well, if you're a bona fide researcher they can get it for you as an 'accommodation'," Harold allowed. "But they're going to scrutinize you..."

Just then R. U. Sirius and Lord Nose emerged from La Hagen's dressingroom. "Boy, she's really out there," said Lord Nose. "I liked the bit about the Space Brothers and the Music of the Spheres" said R.U.. "Guess what?!" I exclaimed breathlessly. "This is Eric and one of the Flying Tarantulas—they're into tarantula venom and I'm going to write them up for the next issue!"

"Shhhh! Don't tell anyone!" said Harold, looking nervously over at the other boardroom table full of reporters and photographers covering Nina's "Ecstasy Drive '85" (next stop Rio). "It's extremely illegal and we'll get into trouble."

"But how am I going to get you all this great publicity?" That was a real stumbler, and as Eric and I mooted over what could be revealed to the vulgar herd, Harold suddenly interjected "Ever done any cow-tipping?"

"What's cow-tipping?" we all asked in unison. Harold came from Minnesota, where it was great sport. "You know how cows sleep standing up?" he said. "Well you go out in a pasture where they're standing around sleeping and give 'em a little nudge (he demonstrated) and they fall over. Just like dominoes." He chortled wickedly. R.U. and Lord Nose exchanged one long telling glance.

We argued about whether they were authentic venom-heads all the way home. "Look, Gullibleson," said Lord Nose, who tended to patronize me, "that whole thing was a monumental put-on. Have you lost every shred of critical intelligence?"

"It was not!" I retorted hotly. "I remember tarantula venom from the homeopathic materia medica. I think it produced chorea or jerking and twitching of the limbs."

"Sounds grand," said Lord Nose, dripping with irony. "And what about the cow-tipping?"

"Oh, that was just to throw us off the scent." Lord Nose could be absolutely maddening at times. As soon as we got back, I dashed for my materia medica—Boericke's, the bible of the homeopath, looking rather like a much-thumbed devotional text with its marbled end-papers and gold stamping. "There it is!" I exclaimed with triumph. "Oh *god*—listen! This sounds absolutely tailor-made for the would-be rock magician! 'Remarkable nervous phenomena'," I intoned portentously. (Lord Nose smirked.) " 'Intense sexual excitement.' " (He pricked up his ears.) " 'Lasciviousness mounting almost to insanity.' "

"Hey, let's see that!" He made a grab for the book while I danced back three steps.

" '*Extreme sensitivity to music.*' That's in black letter," I said, "That means it's especially important—like '*moral relaxation*'." I inflected this heavily lowering my voice an octave. "See, that's also in black letter! 'Must keep in constant motion. Extraordinary contractions and movements. Jerking and twitching.' And here under female symptoms: 'vulva hot and dry. Frequent erotic spasms. Pruritis vulvae. Nymphomania.' " As they poured over this last entry, I grabbed *Kent's Materia Medica* from the shelf. Kent, the dean of American homeopaths, was canon. "Look—'great fantastic dancing,' it says. 'Desire to run about, to dance and jump up and down.' "

"Hey, where do I get some of this stuff?"

"Look, it isn't all positive," I cautioned. "Listen to these symptoms: 'excessive hyperæsthesia, burning sensations, fox-like cunning and destructiveness, violence with anger, præcordial anguish, sensation as if the heart twisted and turned around.' "

"Well, is there an antidote?"

"I'm not sure there is. I think you have to dance it off—that's what the tarantella was all about. Look at what Kent says right here at the beginning—quote: 'This terrible poison should never be used except in attenuations.' "

"Well if it's such a terrible poison, how can they smoke it before every performance?"

NTISMO
THE
RN-DAY
AGICIAN

Kennedy

"I don't know. They're young. They're resilient... Maybe the pyrolytic products are less toxic. Anyway, smoking it, you could calibrate the dosage better. I bet this stuff's been used in certain rarified rock milieux for years. Listen to what they call the 'physiognomy': 'the face shows a pale earthy hue. Eyes are wide, shining and staring, with a look almost of terror. Inflamed parts are dark red or purplish and swollen. Throbbing carotids are seen in the neck.' You know, I bet Keith Richard was into it. Or—hey!—remember Dylan's *Tarantula*?"

"You mean his novel?"

"Prose poem."

"Whatever."

"Do you suppose?..."

"Come on, Queen Mu!"

"No *really*! Remember, it was at the galley proof stage with MacMillan back in '66 when Dylan took it back after his so-called 'motorcycle accident'." I traced elaborate quotation marks in the air festooning 'motorcycle accident'.

"Where do you get all this?"

"Oh, it was in all the papers—he got an injunction and they fought it out in the courts until '71 when they finally succeeded in publishing it but not without—rumor had it—deleting certain 'sensitive material.' You know, we never heard about that accident at the time—it was all about six months after the fact. I bet it was a colossal cover-up."

"But didn't he break his back?"

"Supposedly—in three places. His neck, too. But he could have done that on tarantula venom. Gone into clonic spasm. Opisthotonus, they call it. You can flip your back out, arch back so far that..."

"Alison, you're quite *quite* mad you know! But we love you anyway." R.U. was shaking his head in mock concern; Lord Nose was moving to leave. The hour was going on three.

"You know, *Weberman* never believed in his motorcycle accident. He thought it was a cover for some drug overdose. *He* just didn't know what it was!" I called after them—but they were already out the door, elaborately miming my galloping dementia as they disappeared down the steps.

In the next few weeks, I threw myself into the tarantula literature. One fascinating account followed another. There were the studies of choreomanias like St. John's Dance, St. Vitus' Dance, St. Guy's Dance—all with overlapping symptoms, the precise clinical entity or pathology unknown—more often the disease was put down (by modern authorities) to "sympathetic contagion" or mass hysteria. Sometimes it was viewed as a festival of license, the "chorea lascivia" as Paracelsus called it. Some thought it a recrudescence of bacchantic rites that had gone underground for centuries. Checking first in that treasury of occult lore and learning, Lynn Thorndike's *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, I found at least a dozen references in volume 8—it was all the rage in the seventeenth century. As a subject for learned discourse, I mean. Everyone who was anyone pronounced on it—Cardano, Borrichius, Campanella, Baglivi, Athanasius Kircher—why Kircher even wrote three entirely different accounts of it, in *Phonurgia Nova, Musurgia Universalis*, and *Magnes, sive Ars Magnetica*. He, like the others, was fascinated by its bizarre symptomatology and its implications for the understanding of magnetism, music and healing—the preoccupations of both the Pythagorean and Orphic schools.

Augustus Hare described tarantism as he found it in the boot of Italy, early in this century: "... An epidemic of melancholy madness, which pervaded the women of Apulia, ending in frenzies like those of hydrophobia and frequently in death, was believed to proceed from the bite of the tarantula, chiefly because the disease appeared at the season when this spider woke up to its summer life. It was believed that music was the best means of giving relief to the tarantulati, inciting them to dance and causing them to throw off the poison of the tarantola in perspiration. The patient, dressed in white and crowned with flowers, used to be led out into the garden by her friend, and the musicians in attendance would play the air of the tarantella, which the "tarantolata" would follow, only leaving one partner after another until she finally fell down exhausted, when a pail of cold water was thrown on her, and she was put to bed. The epidemic of Apulia, and the belief in the tarantula bite, spread over the whole of Italy, till regular fetes were appointed for the cure, which received the name of 'carnaveletti delle donne'."

That redoubtable Englishwoman, Janet Ross, late Victorian aristocratic eccentric who travelled throughout Sicily and Otranto querying after local folklore, left us a marvelously vivid account of the phenomenon as she found it in the 1880's. Tarantism had long since become institutionalized and was seen as a peculiarly female syndrome, probably because it was women who tended to get bitten while picking grapes or harvesting grain. Men, too, however are recorded as having been accidently poisoned while greedily eating grapes (tarantulas hide in bunches of grapes to build up their internal heat which strengthens the poison) or bitten in the earlobe while sleeping on the ground.

Janet Ross's account, like so many, emphasizes the particular susceptibility of women: "I asked Don Eugenio also about the famous tarantola... (He) told me he had witnessed hundreds of cases. 'There are various species of the insect' (he said) 'of different colors and two different kinds of "tarantismo", the wet and the dry; the women in the fields are the most liable to be bitten, because they wear so little clothing on account of the intense heat. A violent fever is the beginning of the disease. The person bitten sways backwards and forwards, moaning violently. Musicians are called, and if the tune does not strike the fancy of the "tarantata" (the person who has been bitten), she moans louder, crying "No! No! *Basta!* Not that air." The fiddler instantly changes, and the tambourine beats fast and furious to indicate the tempo. At last the "tarantata" approves of the tempo, and springing up, begins to dance frantically.

Her friends try to find out the colour of the "tarantola" that has bitten her, and adorn her dress and her wrists with ribbons of the same tint as the insect: blue, green or red. If no one can indicate the proper color, she is decked with streamers of every hue which flutter wildly about her as she dances and tosses her arms in the air. They generally begin the ceremony indoors, but it often ends in the street, on account of the heat and the concourse of people. When the "tarantata" is quite worn out she is put into a warm bed and sleeps, sometimes for eighteen hours at a stretch. If it is a case of wet tarantismo, the musicians sit near a well, to which the "tarantata" is irresistably attracted. While she is dancing, relays of friends deluge her with water.'

Don Eugenio went on to describe an autocratic master-mason who vehemently rejected the reality of tarantismo and put it down to female malingering or hysteria. As luck or San Cataldo would have it, he himself was bitten and in his frenzy tore down his doors and was soon seen jumping about in the streets crying "Hanno ragion' la femmine! Hanno ragion' la femmine!" (The women are right! The women are right!) (The Land of Manfred, London, 1889)

Extract from the book *Tarantismo*
to be published by *High Frontiers*,
Summer 1987

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High Frontiers *interviewed Alison Kennedy (alias Alison Wonderland or Queen Mu) in her aerie in the Berkeley hills. The room was full of divine clutter: stacks of xeroxes, pylons of books bristling with multicolored markers. She seemed somewhat less manic than when we'd last seen her. She had sedated herself, she confided, for the ordeal. Brandy? we wondered. Tryptophane? Valerian root with tincture of glow worm?*

High Frontiers: Great opening! I expected something turgid and dry from those stacks of xeroxes you've amassed. But didn't you doctor it a bit - use a little literary licence?

Alison: Not at all! That's precisely how the whole thing unfolded. In fact, I had no idea what I was dealing with when I first stumbled on this Orphic gold mine—the vastness of it, it's extraordinary ramifications. I just thought: "What a great little bagatelle this would make for *High Frontiers*. I'll knock it off in a week and go back to my Great Work—which was sting-rays.

H.F.: And that was a year ago?

AK: Just over—September 31, 1985, and I've been hot on the trail ever since. At first the aspect that fascinated me was its link with ancient female ecstatic rites—rites that have survived into this century and have in fact been fully and richly documented by ethnomusicologists—though not in the English language. Ernesto de Martino in *La Terra del Rimorso* did a magnificent job collecting all the history and folklore which he integrated with documentary coverage of its present-day survivals in Apulia—the heel of the boot of Italy. The exorcistic ritual associated with the bite is performed annually on the feast day of St. Paul under Church auspices and is attended by hundreds of men and women, especially adolescent boys and girls.

I. M. Lewis has described this "macabre cultural construct" where the libertine spider is identified with the ascetic apostle in *Ecstatic Religion*. They summon the saint with the invocation "My Saint Paul of the Tarantists who pricks the girls in their vaginas, my Saint Paul of the Serpents who pricks the boys in their testicles."

H.F.: Weird stuff! And you say this goes back to Dionysus?

AK: Actually, J. F. Gmelin, back in 1795 appears to have been the first to suggest that this rite was a survival of ancient Bacchantic orgies. The women saved their pocket money all year and made white gowns that were perfect replicas of ancient Greek off-the-shoulder maenad gowns, wore coloured streamers tied to their upper arms which fluttered wildly as they danced, their hair streaming loose and their heads thrown back in ecstasy—exactly as mænads are depicted on Greek vases. Incidentally Patti Smith, one tarantula venom initiate, is depicted wearing just such a gown in the pages of *Babel*. They hired itinerant musicians to play with the money they'd saved for festivals known as "carnaveletti delle donne."

H.F.: So this was a peculiarly female institution?

AK: Well, that's what I thought at first. But now I believe that there are three separate strands of tradition—the female ecstatic rites, the gay Orphic poetic tradition, connected with both seership and the saltimbanques, and the Gypsy love magic and "cante jondo" tradition—popularly known as "Deep Song" or flamenco.

H.F.: It sounds like this spider is found all over the place.

AK: Well, there are many sub-species of Lycosa tarentula—narbonensis, radiata, hispanica, infernalis, etc. and these are found all through the circum-Mediterannean area and near East. There are also other spiders—the mygale for example, or the spiderlike arachnid known as Galeodes, the *Arza* in Sardinia, and even an ant, Mutilla calva. These all produce similar syndromes—profound prostration followed by an exaltation of the nervous system, lascivious dancing, emotional dithyrambs, possession states. All spider poisons profoundly affect the nervous system—possibly because of the ATP in spider venom. The Galeodes found in North Africa seems to be the gadfly or gadbee of antiquity—the *oestros* which caused the "rutting madness" in women—though others have identified it as a kind of Tabanus or horsefly. It's all very confusing—the ancients didn't think in the same strict taxonomic categories as we and the word "tarantula" was applied to any number of critters. The phenomenon itself has been institutionalized differently in each culture—different names, different cures, different functionalist explanations. In Ethiopia or Abyssinia for example, it is know as "Tigretier" or "Tigretismo" and the venom is smoked on hemp in secret cultic rites—by women, the Zars, certain orgiastic Sufi orders. In Andalusia, in Southern Spain, it was used clandestinely by gypsies in love philtres; in the *boda gitana* or Gypsy wedding fiesta, as an ingredient along with menstrual blood in the wedding cake to be consumed by bride and groom; and the blood of the tarantula consumed by Flamenco dancers and musicians to invoke the "duende" or powerful tellurian energy that wells up through the soles of the feet inspiring the most impassioned displays of technical virtuosity and "soul".

H.F.: Before we go any further, maybe you could recapitulate the effects of tarantula venom for our readers. I know you go into much greater detail in the book, but what does T.V. produce besides intense sexual excitation?

AK: Oh, that's just the beginning. You might say that it releases the Kundalini fire. It's a powerful spinal nervous system stimulant—like strychnine, aconite or panther gall bladder. It produces a manic-depressive syndrome to the nth degree and an extraordinary excitation of the special senses—sound, music, color, odor—as well as synæsthesia. It moves up successively through the chakras, producing a really amazing heightening of the emotions reminiscent of "Adam" or the phenethylamine tribe—only with tarantula venom you've got both the agony and the ecstasy—anguish and rapture, a little hell to harrow before you enter into the gates of horn.

H.F.: What are the gates of horn?

AK: The gates of horn gave one access to viridical dreams, prophetic knowledge. But, as Rimbaud said in one of his *Voyant letters*, "*Les souffrances sont énormes*"—The sufferings are immense—"All forms of love, of suffering, of madness... he exhausts within himself all the poisons. Unspeakable torments, where he will need the greatest faith, a superhuman strength, where he becomes the great invalid, the great criminal, the great accursed, and the Supreme Scientist!... So what if he is destroyed in his ecstatic flight through things unheard of, unnameable: other horrible workers will come; they will begin at the horizons where the first has fallen!"

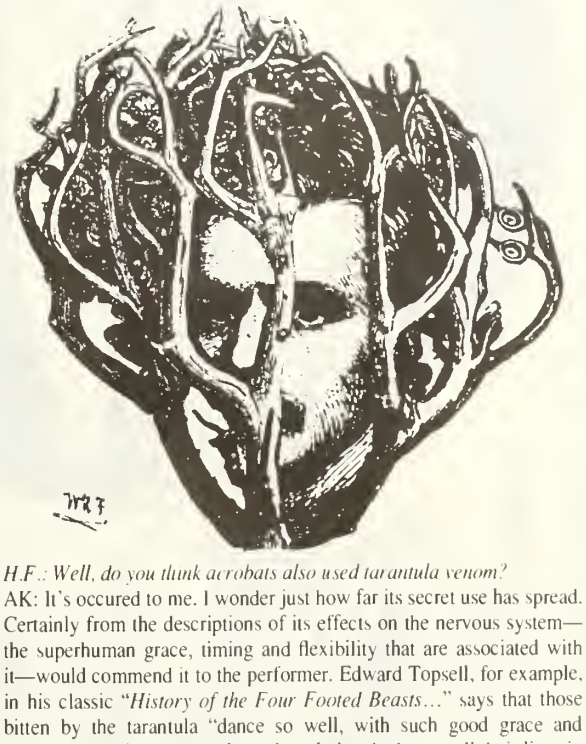
H.F.: It doesn't sound particularly recreational!

AK: Well, tarantula venom *is* incredibly toxic stuff. Lautréamont killed himself on it and Rimbaud effectively burnt out his poetic dæmon. But then again, all the phenethylamines should be used with the greatest circumspection as well. They drain your marrow—what the Greeks call *muelos*, the life stuff, the vital flame. Rimbaud was conscious of how toxic it was—"I'm crapping myself up as much as possible," he wrote. "I say that one must be a *seer*, one must *make* oneself a seer, through a long, immense, and calculated *disordering of all the senses*.

H.F.: Sounds rugged!

AK: It is—but that was central to the Orphic notion of the poet's mission—and personal calvary. It was thought that the soul had to be tempered or perfected through extreme states of suffering. A commonly occuring emblem for the alchemical stage known as the "nigredo" was the crowned heart transpierced by swords. Éliphas Levi places great stress on the idea also. There's a great quote in his *History of Magic*, "Learn how to suffer and learn how to die—such are the *gymnastics of eternity* and such is the immortal novitiate."

"The gymnastics of eternity" is a telling phrase in view of the cult of the saltimbanque in the work of many Orphic poets—Rimbaud, Rilke, Lorca. The poet was seen, in the French Romantic tradition, as taking great risks—as being a high-wire artist, as narrowly escaping the jaws of death. Poets consorted with jugglers and acrobats in the old Commedia dell' Arte days of Theophile Gautier. The surrealists, Picasso, Apollinaire and Rilke, hung out with the trapeze artists of the Cirque Médrano on the outskirts of Paris and immortalized them in their work. "Let's be like them!" cried Rilke. "Let's never fall without dying!" This whole notion of the poet as daredevil artist is alien to us in the English-speaking world bred on the pablum of the poet as effete, limp wristed and phthisical.



H.F.: Well, do you think acrobats also used tarantula venom?

AK: It's occured to me. I wonder just how far its secret use has spread. Certainly from the descriptions of its effects on the nervous system—the superhuman grace, timing and flexibility that are associated with it—would commend it to the performer. Edward Topsell, for example, in his classic "*History of the Four Footed Beasts...*" says that those bitten by the tarantula "dance so well, with such good grace and measure, and sing so sweetly as though they had spent all their lives in some dancing and singing school!" And, of course, the homeopathic reports always mention "contortionistic body movements" as a prime symptom along with "great fantastic dancing."

H.F.: Well, I can see how it would make for some dazzling stage magic.

AK: It's hard to know how many rock performers have been into the stuff. Harold thought Jimi Hendrix might have used it. Any rock musicians who hung out in Marrakech might conceivably have run into it. Patti Smith definitely was into it at one point. On *Radio Ethiopia* she writes "*the drug that surrounds the heart*, the pipe that lies on its side still burns" and sings: "Oh, I see your stare/ it's spiraling up there/ up through the center of my brain/ baby come/ baby go/ and free the hurricane oh i go to the center of the airplane/ baby got a beat in the center of the ring/ and my heart is pumping/ and my fists are pumping"—almost a clinical description of tarantula venom intoxication, with its emphasis on the heart symptoms. "Release (Ethiopium) is the drug... an animal howl says it all," she writes on the back of the album, and takes as the leitmotif for the whole album Breton's "Beauty will be convulsive or not at all."

H.F.: Did her venom use start with Ethiopia?

AK: Oh, no. There are many allusions in her book *Babel*—at least b '73 she was using it. "The Stream" and "Saba the Bird" are abou venom initiation. In "Neo Boy" she writes: "The long animal cry woman is blessed, the perfect merging of beauty and beast, the gree gas moving in like excitement... a woman alone in a tube of sound resound is resounding, a long low whine moving through the spine."

H.F.: What can you tell us about the artist as outcast, as pariah?

AK: Of course, that's a favorite theme of Patti Smith's taken fron Rimbaud. Rimbaud referred to tarantula venom as "*merde*" (eatin *merde* was the code word for T.V. in letters to Verlaine.) He was cons cious of its' being polluting as well as sacred, as being totally beyon the pale, beyond the understanding of petit bourgeois society. He cal led himself "the hyena" (the hyena eats shit as well as carrion and, fo good measure, was said to be hermaphroditic); in other words, th most glorious taboo breaker of them all. His friends were called th "*oestros*," and "the toad's friend." Patti Smith called the artist a ra (anagram of art) or after Rimbaud—a nigger—"the great accursed. And Lautréamont had a whole host of epithets for himself drawn fro the natural history realm.

H.F.: Didn't you say Garcia Lorca was into the stuff?

AK: Well, there is a great deal of internal evidence in his poetry tha he was. He began studying flamenco guitar with two old gypsy maste in the Sacro Monte outside Granada at the age of 17. His extraordinar personal charm and seductiveness may have led one of them to "tur him on" to tarantula venom—even though, normally, no *payo* woul have been let in on it. He helped de Falla organize the first Festival Cante Jondo only a few years later—the woodcut emblazoned on th program cover features, among other emblems of cante jondo, a tara tula in the lower left hand corner. The central icon is the hea transfixed by swords with an eye in the center crying tears of blood markedly similar to the eye in the heart in certain of Athanasius Ki cher's cosmograms or in Sufi emblems. It seems to symbolize lovin compassion or the wisdom of the heart born of soul suffering.

H.F.: Do you have any actual evidence that the gypsies turned him on

AK: No, quite frankly it's all wild surmise. It might have been Manu Torres, with his "black torso of the Pharaoh." Or another possibilit which fits in with the tradition of older gay Orphic poets turning o promising younger poets, is the Count of Miraflores de los Angele whom he met at the Gongora Festival in Seville. He seems to have ha all prerequisites for a T.V. habitué: he was a magician, theosophis hypnotist, poet, and Allumbrado. But really tracing the chain transmission is a fairly futile (if entertaining) exercize.

H.F.: Sometimes these things aren't passed on in a linear way at all...

AK: Precisely! Did Dali get it from Lorca or did he get it from the A lumbrados and Lorca through the gypsies? All we know is, in Spain a least, it's use was closely related to the cante jondo tradition—"Dee Song"—the *soleares* and *siguiriyas* and the cult of the duende. Lorca in his famous lecture on "The Theory and Function of the Duende lists a few of the poets who had a "duende"—that is a dæmon or earth goblin that courses through them producing what's called the furo poeticus. Listen to this quote: "To help us seek the *duende* there i neither map nor discipline. All one knows is that it burns the blood lik powdered glass, that it exhausts, that it rejects all the sweet geometr one has learned, that it compels Goya to paint with his knees and wit his fists horrible bitumen blacks. Or that it leaves Mossen Cinto Ver daguer naked in the cold air of the Pyrenees... that it dresses the deli cate body of Rimbaud in an acrobat's green suit; or that it puts the eye of a dead fish on Count Lautréamont in the early morning Boulevard."

H.F.: Didn't you say that Lautréamont was another initiate?

AK: Well, it was actually this very quote from Lorca that alerted me t the possibility. I already had plenty of evidence for Rimbaud's use b the time I stumbled on this reference, and I had always wondered wh Lautréamont had been taken up and practically *divinized* by the su realists. So I began going through his major work fairl meticulously—*Les Chants de Maldoror*, and there in the fifth *chant*, hit paydirt.

H.F.: Perhaps we should mention that Maldoror *is considered the mas terpiece of fin-de-siecle morbidity.*

AK: And mortality!

H.F.: And dark humor...

AK: And revolt! It's gratuitously grotesque—like grand guignol, he' trying to "gross out" the reader.

H.F.: But funny as hell! It was embraced by the Surrealists an Lautreamont seen as some kind of martyr.

AK: Actually, a swan. Lorca was also called a swan.

H.F.: A swan?

AK: Swan, cisne, was one of the epithets for Orpheus. Orpheus, yo know, was reincarnated as a swan—after his severed head sailed t Lesbos prophesying all the way—a favorite decadent art theme. Breto called Lautréamont "the swan of Montevideo" and boasted, "I hav access to him as a convulsionary."

H.F.: So I suppose Breton is another T.V. initiate.

AK: I was getting to that!—*Poisson Soluble* is, of course, a play o "*Poison soluble*" and it's packed with venom references.

H.F.: But back to Lautréamont!

AK: You know he composed all these poems late at night declaiming loudly to the accompaniment of a piano, quite Pierrot Lunaire. He ma have been constitutionally melancholic, but his work more than an other exemplifies the "depraved fancy" sometimes associated wit tarantula venom. Baglivi says "many have sought the sepulchre an lonely places, and even extended themselves upon the bier. Desperat they court dissolution... The restraints of modesty being loosed, the sigh deeply, howl, make indecent gestures, expose their sexual or

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gans... others like to strike whips on the buttocks, heels, feet, back, etc.. Also strange fancies in regard to colours are observed..."—Anyway, in the fifth "chant," about the slaying of the *eidolon* or double, he refers explicitly to the spider's magnetic spell over his cerebro-spinal nervous system going on nearly two lustra (or ten years) and *twice* he refers to this spider specifically as a tarantula.

H.F.: But how can all these Ph.D. lit. crit. types have missed this?

AK: Ah, but they lack angelic guidance! Once you have the key... you know Rimbaud was always boasting about having the key. "Only I have the key to this savage parade!" he cried. And: "I am an inventor... a musician, even, who has found something that may be the key to love." But it is in *Une Saison en Enfer* that he gives the most sustained blow-by-blow description of tarantula venom intoxication, "To drink strong drink, as strong as molten ore," he cries. "My heart has been stabbed by grace. Ah! I hadn't thought this would happen... I may *die* of earthly love, *die* of devotion... Ah! my lungs burn, my temples roar! My heart... my arms and legs... Fire! Fire at me! Here! I'll give myself up! I'll kill myself! I'll throw myself beneath the horses' hooves! Ah!... I'll get used to it." This last suggests that he had consciously undertaken this ordeal, that this was the first of a series of Orphic "investigations" (his word) that summer at Roche in the old granary where his mother and sister Vitalie pressed their ears against the doors to hear the passionate cries within — a poetomachia of one!

H.F.: Is that recorded somewhere?

AK: Yes—it's in Vitalie's journal. He shut himself up in the granary for weeks, writing *A Season in Hell* and all they heard of him were "moans, sobs, cries of rage, oaths, blasphemies and jeers." In "A Night in Hell" he actually opens by saying "*J'ai avalé une fameuse gorgée de poison*"—"I've just swallowed a terrific mouthful of poison"—and goes on to record meticulously the physical and psychological effects of the venom. "My entrails are on fire. The violence of the venom twists my arms and legs, deforms me, drives me to the ground. I die of thirst, I suffocate, I cannot cry. This is Hell, eternal torment! See how the fire rises! I burn as I must... A man who wants to mutilate himself is certainly damned, isn't he?" And he goes on ranting and expostulating. Then: "My hallucinations are endless... I shall say no more about this; poets and visionaries would be jealous. I am the richest one of all, a thousand times, and I will hoard it like the sea. Oh God—the clock of life stopped but a moment ago. I am no longer within the world. Theology is certainly accurate; hell is certainly *down below*—and heaven is up on high. Ecstasy, nightmare, sleep, is a nest of flames... I will tear the veils from every mystery—mysteries of religion or of nature, death, birth, the future, the past, cosmogony and nothingness. I am a master of phantasmagoria. Listen! Every talent is mine!... Shall I give you Afric chants, belly dancers? Shall I vanish, Shall I dive after the *ring*?... Shall I? I will make gold, and medicines... Put your faith in me, then; faith comforts, it guides and it heals. Come unto me all of you—even the little children—let me console you, let me pour out my heart for you—my *miraculous heart*!" This fearful gamut of emotions is typical of tarantula venom intoxication—the messianizing, the grandiosity, the sweeping cosmic dioramas. Having experienced something of this myself, on a combination of adam, 2CB, and acid, I immediately recognized the utter authenticity of it. Rimbaud goes on in his *Délires II: Alchimie du Verbe* to describe quite methodically, how he went about forging a new poetic language of all the senses. "I began it as an investigation. I turned silences and nights into words. What was unutterable, I wrote down. I made the whirling world stand still." In the section "Faim," he speaks of the "bindweed's (morning glory's) gay venom." Significantly, in the recently published *brouillon* or rough draft, I found that it was a spider, in fact "the Romantic spider" (*l'araignée romantique*)—that he had originally written but that he substituted "morning glory" in the published form.

"*Heureuse la taupe, sommeil de toute la virginité!*" he cries. "Happy the mole, slumber of (ritual) virginity!" *L'Herbe à la taupe* is Datura and mole's hearts eaten were said in Pliny to confer the gift of prophecy. He goes on to describe the damage to his nervous system: "It affected my health. Terror loomed ahead. I would fall again and again into a heavy sleep, which lasted several days at a time, and getting up I continued with the same sad dreams: I was ripe for death and my weakness led me down dangerous roads to the edge of the world, and of Cimmeria, home of whirlwinds and darkness." And worst of all, he mourns the loss of that animating force in human existence: *Desire*.

H.F.: Ah, Desire. *I imagine this brings us back to Dylan.*

AK: Precisely! It is, in fact, the album on which Dylan most clearly spells out his use of tarantula venom. The album cover features Dylan dressed in the manner of a young *Rom*—the gypsy look he favored during The Rolling Thunder Tour. In the liner notes he himself wrote he says "Where do I begin... on the heels of Rimbaud moving like a dancing bullet through the hot New Jersey night filled with *venom* and wonder."

H.F.: But surely that's figurative?

AK: That's what Dylan's counting on us assuming. Dylan's got a lot of hubris, but he doesn't *really* want to give it away.

H.F.: But still, I haven't heard anything really unambiguous.

AK: Oh, you want something unambiguous? Well, then there's Rimbaud's *Poison Perdu* ("Forgotten Poison") published and authenticated by Verlaine in *La Cravache* in 1888 but, strangely, left out of almost every edition of his work since.

The opening stanzas describe a typical Pierrot Lunaire scene of taking tea on the balcony under the moonlight. Stanza three says: "Pricked into the edge of the blue curtain shines a pin with a head of gold, like a large insect that sleeps. The point of the pin is tempered or quenched ("*trempée*") in a sharp poison. I take you—be prepared for me at the hours of the desires of death."

H.F. What does the pin symbolize?

AK: I don't think it's symbolic at all. I think it was used to draw blood from the tarantula. Lorca uses it similarly only it's an old rusty pin instead of a gold-headed pin. In "Double Poem of Lake Eden" he cries: "Horned dwarf, let me pass through to the wood of yawnings and stretchings and exhilarated jumps. *For I know the most secret use of an old rusty pin* and I know the horror of wide open eyes in the tangible surface of the dish."

H.F.: Who's the horned dwarf?

AK: The *duende* of course, and it's a rusty pin because rust had occult meaning to the gypsies, and the dish probably referred to lecanomancy—divination through gazing at a basin of water.

H.F.: Most ingenious. But is it true?

AK: Well, probably only Philip Cummings could say for sure. He's the young American poet Lorca had met at the *Residencia* in Madrid and was visiting at Lake Eden—his family cabin. He's now just over eighty and still going strong And though I talked to him yesterday on the telephone, I hesitated somehow to broach the subject of spider venom!

H.F.: What makes you think he would know?

AK: The poems written at that period were clearly written under the influence of tarantula venom. Look at *Cielo Vivo* or *Danza de la Muerte*. Also, Lorca wrote Angel del Rio from Eden Mills: "Hidden among the ferns I found a distaff covered with spiders... Cognac is urgent for my poor heart." He must have taken a supply back to New York City for he writes, "The mask! Lo, the mask! Spitting wilderness venom over New York's imperfect despair!" Many people have compared Lorca's *Poet in New York* with Rimbaud's *Saison en Enfer*. John Crow describes his mode of working in those months—and it's strikingly reminiscent of Lautréamont: "When he settled down to write poetry in the early morning hours of New York after midnight it was with the strained voice, the high key, the midnight fervours of nostalgia burning deep in the darkness. And the picture was no salutory sight." "With an *A* and an *E* and an *I* knifing into my throat" cried Lorca. "I am a wounded pulse probing what lies on the other side." And after the paroxysms of the night, whether spent in love-making or poetic composition, the prostration of the dawn—"the desires of death"—see "He died at Dawn" or Rimbaud's *Matinée d'Ivresse* ("This poison will stay in our veins even when, as the fanfares depart, we return to our former disharmony") and the physical exhaustion and neuro-endrocine depletion where he's left as immobile as a statue (see "Longing of a Statue").

H.F.: But you said he began taking tarantula venom years before—

AK: Yes, but it reached a crescendo in the savage surrealism of "A Poet in New York". He must have tried it at least by 1920 for he writes then of "spider of silence, spider of oblivion" and was early fascinated by the insect world—something he had in common with Rimbaud and Lautréamont who were weaned on Dr. Chenu's "Encyclopédie Naturelle." Lorca's first play *The Butterfly's Evil Spell* was all about cockroaches! And the cicada was a favorite metaphor for those artists who exploded in heavenly sound and light. "Let my heart be a cicada," he cries "Let it die, singing slowly, wounded by the blue heaven." In his lecture on "Cante Jondo" he writes of the great cantaores burning themselves out: "They were immense interpreters of the popular heart, who destroyed their own hearts, among the storms of feeling. Almost all of them died a death of the heart, that is they exploded like enormous cicadas." So the fascination was there with the whole phenomenology of the soul, states of poetic rapture, extreme states of passion and madness all associated with insects. Plato in *Phaedrus* speaks of the four forms of divine madness: poetic madness, Bacchic madness, prophetic madness and the madness of love and it is the whole panoply that we get with tarantula venom.

H.F.: In the book, you say that Lorca made a surrealistic film about his tarantula venom trips.

AK: Yes, he wrote the silent film scenario called "*Trip to the Moon*". He teamed up with a young Mexican film maker, Emilio Amero, whom he met in New York. Lorca had been devastated by Bunuel supplanting him in Dali's affections (that was the *crise de coeur* in 1928 that prompted his trip to New York.) He had seen "Un chien Andalou" which Bunuel and Dali collaborated on and must have decided to go them one better. All the favorite Lorca themes are here: the boy in the saltimbanque suit, the Gypsy spook Roelejunda crying tears of blood, the moon emerging from a skull, fish palpitating in agony, frogs, close ups of male and female sexual parts. The protagonist, the thunderstruck man with veins painted on his body, must have been Lorca himself on tarantula venom—his "trip to the moon" (he reportedly made six "trips to the moon" in this period). And the name "Elena, Helena" that flashes on the screen and fades into screams must surely refer to Helena Diakonoff, or "Gala" who had, by that time, definitively supplanted him as Dali's great love. Frustrated love is the dominant theme.

H.F.: Fascinating! I'd never heard of this film.

AK: Few people have. The Spanish original is still Amero's possession. *He* would probably know—wherever he is—about Lorca's tarantula venom habit. Cummings must have known but we can bet he wouldn't tell us—not the man who destroyed the packet of manuscripts Lorca entrusted him with the admonition to keep them safe. We'll never know what they contained because he destroyed them as soon as he heard of the poet's death—after first reading them. "They were dreadful," he said laconically. "I burned them."

H.F.: What a crime. But surely there's some other link.

AK: Well, of course Dali knows all. If only *Vanity Fair* had asked about tarantula venom instead of the Rape of Europa. Lorca was madly in love with Dali from their student days at the *Residencia*. As Dali said in a recent interview: "Lorca was in love with me—you know this? He had this tremendous love of only men and Dali is very young, and beautiful, and he's crazy about me! Crazy! Crazy! Crazy!"

H.F.: How Daliesque! Where'd you get that?

AK: In *Explosion of the Swan*, an interview published by Black Sparrow Press. And here's a picture of them at the beach. They spent several summers together at Cadaqués but in 1928 Bunuel usurped him in Dali's affections and he plunged into a deep depression—he was particularly stung by Dali's calling his work retrogressive. This depression reached a climax in the spring of 1929 when he joined a religious brotherhood, the Confradia de Santa Maria de la Alhambra. In Holy Week he actually headed the procession of penitents in Granada, wearing a hooded penitential robe and carrying the cross!

H.F.: Holy Toledo!

AK: (laughs) No, but close. Of course, he was innately extravagant and manic-depressive. Most people remember him as a charmer, gentle, *sympatico*, always "on", but Dali describes another side of Lorca: "The poetic phenomenon in its entirety and 'in the raw' presented itself before me in flesh and bone, confused, blood-red, viscous and sublime, quivering with a thousand fires of darkness and *subterranean biology*."

H.F.: So you think they were exploring this world of subterranean biology together?

AK: I think that's inevitable—though of course Dali would never admit to an exogenous source of inspiration. "I don't take hallucinogens!" he cried. "I *am* a hallucinogen!" But his surreal universe; his paintings for *Les Chants de Maldoror*; the "blood is sweeter than honey" first Communion incident from *The Secret Life*; the painting "Spider in the Afternoon"; an article that appeared in 1941 in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, "Spiders—that's what fascinates Dali most about Virginia," all argue to the contrary.

H.F.: How did they take it?

AK: Lorca refers repeatedly to a pin: "the most secret use of an old rusty pin" or "On a pin's point my love is spinning!" I think they were puncturing the dorsum of the spiders' abdomen lightly with a pin—and the blood or hemolymph would spurt out without permanently injuring the spider. The hemolymph of spiders is green—blueish green when fresh oxidizing to brownish green—because the hemocyanin molecule is based on copper instead of iron as in mammals. The meaning of the line most often identified with Lorca—and yet puzzlingly cryptic—"*Verde que te quiero verde*"—"Green how I want you green"—in the *Somnambular Ballad* is now patently obvious.

H.F.: And you've got the patent on hemolymph extraction?

AK: Oh, I'd never do it!—It's simply too toxic to the heart. It's probably what did Jim Morrison in.

H.F.: Really?

AK: No, that's just a wild rumor! My wild rumor. But he's fairly Orphic and a great admirer of Rimbaud's.

H.F.: You keep using the word Orphic and though it's pretty late in the game, could you explain what you mean by it?

AK: Ah, orphism. This could be never-ending. John Warden says that given the will and ingenuity, *anything* can be shown to be Orphic. As a myth, it contains dozens of sub-motifs: the magician-poet who can tame the forces of nature, the descent into Hades, the loss of the beloved, the last minute breaking of a taboo, the dismemberment by incensed rampaging females (like Pentheus), the decapitated oracular head, the power to charm beasts and cure the bites and stings of venomous animals: the stellio, the adder and the tarantula. One interesting aspect that has not been sufficiently emphasized is the mysogynist character of Orpheus (post-Eurydice), the fact that he addressed himself solely to men (like Robert Bly). Women were forbidden to participate in Orphic rites or even enter into the sacred precinct around his shrine. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Orpheus advocates pederastic love. But still the most important aspect of the Orpheus story is his ability to cure through the power of music and sound. He could halt the five archetypal tortures (Tantalus, Ixion, Tityos, Danaides, Sisyphus) and counteract the madness caused by the siren's

song with his more potent music.

H.F.: So Orpheus represents the musician as Healer?

AK: Yes, but not merely a medium or channel; he's a rigorously trained thaumaturge who uses his mastery of musical tones, modes, vowel sounds and colours to draw down the different planetary influences. And as a seer or prophet he was master of the art of divination through mirrors or basins of water—the encounter with the double—a higher-octave Narcissus. The psychosomatic effects of the eight different modes—Phrygian, Lydian, Dorian, etc. is a vast subject—too vast to go into here. The vibrational affinities between the vowels, colours, tones and planets goes back to Gnostic incantations and is described in Empedocles' *Purifications* and Plato's *Charmides*. The seven Greek vowels were magical symbols of the music of the spheres and were uttered by the initiate to intensify the incantation or used as amulets. Rimbaud, in his enigmatic *Voyelles*, combined the vowels with colours, alchemical symbolism and tarantula imagery to create a real tour-de-force. "A, black belt, hairy with bursting flies"—the black belt referring to the characteristic marking on the ventral side of the tarantula: E, white—sand, the tarantula's habitat; I, crimson—blood, rage; U, green—divine peace; O, violet—the angelic or transcendent. (The last three referring to the qualitatively different kinds of tarantula venom trips). Rimbaud was preternaturally conscious of his orphic calling from the age of fourteen—and conscious of the grueling discipline involved. "Careful, mind." he writes in *The Impossible*. "Don't rush madly after salvation. Train yourself!" "La science que j' entreprends est une science distincte de la poesie," said Lautréamont in his *Poesies*.

The soul of Orpheus was thought to successively incarnate in Homer, Pythagoras, Ennius, then (after a lapse of 1600 years) in Marsilio Ficino. Ficino, who wrote *The Book of Life*, a manual of self-cultivation, and was patronized by Lorenzo de' Medici, played an Orphic lyre emblazoned with a picture of Orpheus and sang the ancient Orphic hymns with incredible sweetness. Cosimo de' Medici invited him to come down to the villa for the weekend and added "And don't forget to bring your lyre when you come." Lorca must certainly have incarnated the soul of Orpheus in this century. He wrote: "In a century of zeppelins and stupid deaths I sob at my piano dreaming of the Handelian mist and I create verses very much my own, singing the same to Christ as to Buddha, to Mohammed, and to Pan. For a lyre I have my piano and, instead of ink, the sweat of yearning, yellow pollen of my inner lily and my great love." In the Renaissance, *humanitas* is defined as the capacity for love, and the effect of Orpheus' song was to lead man to love. Love is the power that produces harmony in all things—Love is "inventive, double-natured, holding the keys to everything." Double natured, like sacred and profane Venus, like the two musics of Urania and Polyhymnia. And Orpheus, having suffered to such an extreme, is endowed with the *furor amatorius* which can lead man to a state of joy.

H.F.: Where is our Orpheus today?

AK: I suspect that he'll come out of the ranks of Rock music. We are so close to an understanding of music and affective states, music as healer and purifier. With the incredible sophistication of acoustic technology, the resources of the Rock Industry, and the surprising intelligence of some of the people within it, it is just a matter of time before Orpheus' soul incarnates again.

H.F.: There was no mention at all of Orpheus at that "Ritual and Rapture" Conference last month. ("Ritual and Rapture: From Dionysus to the Grateful Dead" sponsored by U.C. Berkeley featured mythologist Joseph Campbell and Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart.)

AK: I know—I thought that was remarkable! Mickey Hart's writing a book: *On the Edge of Magic*, but he's still on the edge. Both he and Jerry Garcia professed themselves to be essentially mediums. Orphism is the next stage beyond Dionysiac possession, beyond catharsis. It requires soul-suffering and transcendence, then deep study and ritual practice.

H.F.: Are you suggesting that rock musicians start hitting the books?

AK: Not necessarily, but there is a fantastic treasury of ancient manuscripts, housed at the University of Texas at Austin. J•• n L«« ~ was just telling me about it. He delved into it a bit a few years ago when he was writing a score for a film on Kepler's "Music of the Spheres"

H.F.: What does it contain? Incantations on old mummy wrappings, that sort of thing?

AK: Lots of Renaissance musical treatises—survivals and systematizations of Pythagorean lore. He said there were really bizarre fantastic things there—charts, anatomical drawings showing different modes or musical tones streaming through nerve fibers and plexi or resonating in ventricles: five floors of the stuff; they plundered Europe after the war, brought it in by the railroad carload. Somebody should really begin looking seriously at the musical material.

H.F.: Or frivolously!

AK: Frivolously, even. Also, there's a semi-reformed cranial surgeon up in Santa Rosa, Joel Alter, who now has a holistic health clinic where he's working with sonic resonances in healing. He claims that musical vibrations and vowel sounds produce standing waves in the cerebrospinal fluid in the ventricles that actually mediate the production of neuro- hormones.

H.F.: Are there any rock artists who are implementing these discoveries in their music?

AK: You tell me. You know the rock scene far better than I. Is anyone consciously using musical energies in an Orphic way?

H.F.: It's hard to say. You were probably right earlier when you said that the primary impulse of most rock has been more Dionysian. They're into catharsis, they're into release—release from stress, sexual frustration, social tensions, whatever. And they're into bacchanalian celebration... Jagger, Patti Smith, Jim Morrison all made direct references to Dionysianism at one time or another. I'd say most of the powerful performers these days are post-modern ironists—like David Byrne, Bowie, Laurie Anderson—not particularly Orphic. But I can think of several people whose works I would check, if I were you, for Orphic elements... Peter Gabriel, Van Morrison, Todd Rundgren, Kate Bush...

AK: Oh I loved Kate Bush's *Hounds of Love*. It's really quite ecstatic.

H.F.: I heard that she incorporated a lot of Gurdjieff's musical theories in that album. They might be based on Orphic notions.

AK: One record that impressed me recently—in more ways than one—was the new double album by This Mortal Coil. It's got some distinctly Orphic elements to it.

H.F.: Oh, is that the one you were telling me about with Tarantula *on it?*

AK: Yes, someone gave me a copy. He'd heard the refrain "Tarantula... Tarantula" coming over the airwaves in the dead of night and leapt out of bed to write down the title. It's called *Filigree and Shadow*—doubtless a reference to Moorish architecture. The lyrics cover all the basic leitmotifs of tarantismo—the shining staring eyes, (in fact, they're on the cover), the initial numbness or prostration, the mask, the double, the thunder (Rimbaud's *tempête*, Lautréamont's *tourbillon*, Patti Smith's hurricane), the sense that one's another person—"another person living in a parallel reality" is the way Harold of the Flying Tarantulas put it, "Je *est un autre*" were Rimbaud's words. The first verse runs:

"I'm living but I'm feeling numb,
you can see it in my stare
I wear a mask so closely now
and I don't know who I am
This poison wells inside of me
eroding me away
I've noticed in other eyes
things closing in...
But when the thunder breaks
it breaks for you and me
Tarantula, tarantula"

The last verse ends rather abruptly:

"My world's under a sentence of death
I was born under (grass) clouds
But when the pressure gets too much for me
I *bite!*
I - I - I - I - I - E - I - E - I - E - I - E - O - O - O - O - O"

This kind of sudden, quirky, animal-like violence is often described in clinical reports of tarantismo, or of possession states. The "squared mouth" of the Greek mask of tragedy, the "bouche carrée" of Lautréamont; the characteristic animal howls, and eeriest of all, a peculiar "yelp"—... "the stylized cry of the tarantulees, the 'crisis cry', an *ahiii* uttered with various modulations, that sounds more like the yelping of a dog than a human cry." (Gilbert Rouget, DeMartino). Darwin has an illuminating discussion of the paroxysms of rage, grief, terror and joy and how they produce strange involuntary sounds depending on the different muscle groups powerfully contracted.

H.F.: This is fascinating, and clearly relevant, but is such music orphic?

AK: Well, it's probably pre-Orphic. Not having looked at those incunabula at Austin, I don't really know what Orphic means. The music Rimbaud composed on his death bed and played on a hand organ was probably Orphic.

H.F.: Oh? What's this? I've never heard of Rimbaud composing music.

AK: Well, none of it survives unfortunately—we'll never know what it was like—except that it was described as "supernal fugues of essences and quintessences." He probably played it to heal himself in those weeks in Marseilles after they amputated his leg. Anyone who has even *contemplated* taking tarantula venom should read his sister Isabelle's description of those last days—the hellish sufferings, "the incessant wails and indescribable despair." The most terrible, exquisite pathos I have ever read—his damnation foreshadowed years earlier: "Hadn't I once a youth that was lovely, heroic, fabulous—something to write down on pages of gold?... I was the creator of every feast, every triumph, every drama. I tried to invent new flowers, new planets, new flesh, new languages. I thought that I had acquired supernatural powers. Ha! I have to bury my imagination and my memories! What an end to a splendid career as an artist and storyteller! I! I called myself a magician, an angel, free from all moral constraint!... I am sent back to the soil to seek some obligation, to wrap gnarled reality in my arms!"

H.F.: So, have we said it sufficiently loud and clear yet? For all you kids out there in Radioland—Don't, I repeat, do not try tarantula venom!

AK: It permanently imprints the nervous system with a manic-depressive syndrome—and it's probably carcinogenic.

H.F.: There are much better things out there!

AK: Or on the drafting boards—or the computer simulation modelling screens. Anyway, psycho-nutrition is where it's at! And be sure to tone up your thymus glands!

H.F. So back to Orpheus—any candidates for Orpheus out there?

AK: Well, being a child of the sixties, I kind of thought it might be Dylan. His life follows the typical Orphic pattern—the descent into Hades, the loss of his wife Sarah, the retirement into the wilds of Thrace (read upper New York State), and finally this year his resurfacing after the long Rip van Winkle-like hibernation. I thought he might be about to reveal his "gnawing secret"—the "hydre intime" of tarantula venom use—when I heard his 1986 summer concert tour was called "True Confessions."

H.F.: Gnawing secret?

AK: Well, those were actually Henry Miller's words describing Rimbaud: "The *hydre intime* eats away until even the core of one's being becomes sawdust and the whole body is like unto a temple of desolation." Desolation, damnation of the soul—some of the meanings that have been attached to the "*Ten of Swords*."

H.F.: That's the name of the new bootleg Dylan album. I wondered where that came from.

AK: Significantly, out on Tarantula Records. Dylan seems to have a very loyal and protective entourage, but clearly somebody out there knows. Patti Smith in *Babel* writes "Have you seen dylans dog? it got wings, it can fly, if you speak of it to him, it's the only time dylan can't look you in the eye."

H.F.: But damnation of the soul? Isn't that a bit strong?

AK: Well, he said in Tarantula that he'd made a Faustian pact with the devil to get away from Middle America. The gypsies atttach a particularly malign significance to the ten of swords. In Crowley's *Book of Thoth*, it is ruled by the sun in Gemini: (Dylan's sign) and represents "the culmination of unmitigated energy... the ruin of the Intellect and even of all mental and moral qualities."

H.F.: I don't see any evidence of ruined intellect

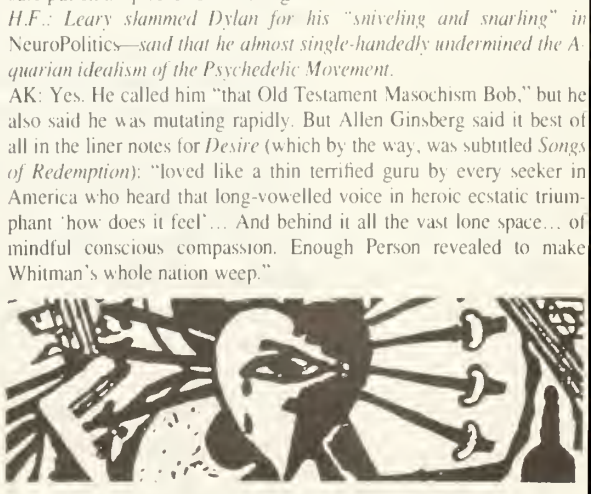
AK: Look, I'm just quoting. The card itself is reminiscent of the pierced heart in alchemical and cante jondo symbolism—anguish, dissolution. Rachel Pollack has the best discussion of it. "You are physically ruined by the intensity," she writes in *The 78 Degrees of Wisdom*. "Your mind has been stretched to its outer limit... The 10 swords in a man's body including one in his ear suggest hysteria and the idea 'no one has ever suffered as much as me'." "Non est dolor sicut dolor meus": Dylan has written this in many ways especially in his born-again lyrics.

H.F.: Oh, have you found evidence in his lyrics?...

AK: Look, I'm into grand synthesis—not minute textual exegesis! But there are a few things—"I know all about poison, I know all about fiery darts" he says in "What Can I Do For You?" In "Where Are You Tonight (Journey Through Dark Heat)" he says: "The truth was obscure, too profound and too pure, to live it you had to explode" and "I fought with my twin, that enemy within, 'til both of us fell by the way, Horseplay and disease is killing me by degrees while the law looks the other way."

H.F.: Horseplay must be about heroin—but disease?

AK: Well, in the same period he wrote "Legionnaire's Disease" which clearly describes tarantismo—the title slyly referring to North Africa via the French Foreign Legion. "Some say it was radiation, some say there was acid on the microphone, some say a combination turned their hearts to stone. But whatever it was, it drove them to their knees, Oh, Legionnaire's disease./ I wish I had a dollar for everyone that died that year" (Edie Sedgewick? Jim Morrison? Jimi Hendrix?) "Got 'em hot by the collar, plenty an old maid's shed a tear: Now within my heart, it sure put on a squeeze. Oh that Legionnaire's disease."

H.F.: Leary slammed Dylan for his "sniveling and snarling" in NeuroPolitics*—said that he almost single-handedly undermined the Aquarian idealism of the Psychedelic Movement.*

AK: Yes. He called him "that Old Testament Masochism Bob," but he also said he was mutating rapidly. But Allen Ginsberg said it best of all in the liner notes for *Desire* (which by the way, was subtitled *Songs of Redemption*): "loved like a thin terrified guru by every seeker in America who heard that long-vowelled voice in heroic ecstatic triumphant 'how does it feel'... And behind it all the vast lone space... of mindful conscious compassion. Enough Person revealed to make Whitman's whole nation weep."